

/Turkic Peoples of Sinkiang/

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779 region. A new type of art was introduced and adopted by the people, and it dominates to this day. The set patterns of Islamic decorative arts and handicrafts were transmitted to the Eastern Turki from the Islamic centers of civilization by way of Persia. Sinkiang, however, has not achieved so much in these fields of arts and crafts as did other Moslem countries, such as Persia and Turkey.

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779 As statues and mural paintings of religious character are strictly forbidden by the Moslem religion, the artistic expression is to be found mainly in the field of ornamentation. The decorative art is employed both in religious and secular objects—the walls of mosques as well as those of private houses; books, both secular and religious, and objects of daily use—are all elaborately ornamented in similar patterns. We find the same patterns of ornamental designs in mosque walls, in the beautifully woven rugs, in silk, embroidery works, brocaded caps, books, wood carving, leather and metal works. The most common patterns are geometric and floral ones. The use of human and animal figures is prohibited by the Koran, but the tradition allows their use in secular objects. The prohibition of the Koran is strictly observed in the decoration of mosques, Korans and other religious objects, but the rule is often discarded in other cases.

The most common motif in Islamic decorative art is the arabesque. The arabesque is an ornament composed of gracefully curving scrolls, crossed or interlaced and bearing stylized motifs suggesting a leaf or a flower. Besides the arabesque we find in Islamic art the representation of plants and filated and floral scrolls. The geometrical ornament is widespread in its use also, either by itself or in combination with arabesques or floral scrolls. Circles, lozenges, crosses, triangles, wavy bands and lines, form the simplest motifs of this kind of ornamentation.

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779 Of special interest is the use of calligraphy as ornamentation. Arabic writing, in both the Kufic and Naskhi styles, plays a very important role in Islamic ornamentation. The highly decorative characters are often elaborately intertwined with scrolls and sometimes terminate in palmettes. This art of calligraphy was cultivated from the earliest times of Islam. The formal style, the Kufic, is characterized by the angular letters, while the second style, the Naskhi, is a cursive style with rounded letters. The work of calligraphy is often ably complemented by that of the book binders. The leather used to cover books is looted or stamped with gold, with the designs as described above, the decoration being on both the inside and the outside of the cover.

• [213] 000 Khotan is the most famous of the cities in Sinkiang in the